

**Minutes of the Advisory Committee  
to the  
Blind and Physically Handicapped Library Services  
Mississippi Library Commission  
August 17, 2006**

The regularly scheduled meeting of the Advisory Committee to the Blind and Physically Handicapped Library Services (BPHLS) Division of the Mississippi Library Commission (MLC) was held on Thursday, August 17, 2006, at the Mississippi Library Commission, 3881 Eastwood Drive, Jackson, Mississippi.

Members present included Mike Duke, Jan Hawthorne, Ralph Smitherman, Kelley Schaefer, Pshon Barrett, Paul Cartwright, Ed Hill, Al Williamson, Sam Gleese, Gene Cryder, Robin Thomas, Billy Tannehill, and Mike Chew. Guests included Judy Dixon, NLS representative, Franklin Johnson, B.J. LeJeune, and Moneekia Hill. MLC staff attending included Sharman Smith, Jane Smith, Rahye Puckett, Mark Skaggs, John Whitlock, Gina Dyess, Margaret Smitherman, Cindy Nugent, Jerry Roberts, Charles Murray, and Andy Stogner.

Mike Duke, Chair, called the meeting to order at 10:15 a.m. Dr. Judy Dixon, Acting Head of the NLS Braille Development Section, was introduced and welcomed. New committee members Jan Hawthorne, Billy Tannehill, Robin Thomas, Ed Hill, Alison Smitherman, and Gene Cryder, were also introduced and welcomed for four-year terms.

The minutes of the February 9, 2006 meeting were reviewed. A motion was made by Ralph Smitherman to approve the minutes as distributed. Jan Hawthorne seconded. The motion carried unanimously.

**COMMITTEE REPORTS:**

***Bylaws Committee*** – No report.

***Machine Retrieval Committee*** – This report was included as part of the Telephone Pioneers Report.

***Publicity Committee*** – Rahye Puckett reported that the library staff has been involved in many outreach programs and that details would be provided in the Librarian's Report.

**Technology Assessment Committee** – Judy Dixon presented information about several portable reading devices, including the Book Port, the Milestone, the MuVo, the Playaway, and the I-Pod Shuffle. They were passed around the room so all could see them. Explanations followed as to the operation of these devices. Jan Hawthorne stated that RFB&D would no longer produce cassettes after 2006. Books will be produced in CD format. The Library is looking for volunteers who use screen readers to navigate the MLC website to determine if the site is accessible and easy to use. Franklin Johnson briefly described some functions of the Nokia 6682 and the 6620 cell phones. Rahye Puckett stated that there would be an Adaptive Technology Workshop, provided through the Mississippi Library Commission (MLC) Continuing Education Program, as part of the Mississippi Library Association's Annual Conference scheduled to be held in October. Barbara Mates, Director of the Cleveland (Ohio) Public Library's Library for the Blind and Physically Handicapped, will provide a program. Project START will display and assist participants with a wide range of adaptive technology and assistive devices for the hands-on portion of the workshop.

**Nominating Committee** – A new Nominating Committee was appointed. Ralph Smitherman, Pshon Barrett, Alison Smitherman, and Kelly Schaeffer will serve, with Ralph acting as Chair.

#### **NLS REPORT – JUDY DIXON:**

Judy Dixon began working for NLS in 1981 in Consumer Relations. She stated that the company developing the digital talking book (DTB) player is in the process of seeking a patent for their product. The machine, cartridge and the mailing container are in the development stage. The DTB player is much smaller than the current audio cassette player. There will be two DTB player models—a basic and an advanced. Sometime in 2007 the new digital players---on a very limited scale---would probably be distributed through the lending libraries throughout the country, and that each library would receive a specific number of these new machines.

NLS has been recording in the digital format since 2002 and by the time the players become prevalent, NLS hopes to have approximately 20,000 books available. It was noted that there would be one book per cartridge and maybe three to five per cent of the books would be on two cartridges. NLS will maintain a standard size cartridge. Books will remain unabridged and plans are to offer the same number of titles per year as are currently offered. The flash memory cartridge will have Braille labeling and is similar in size to a cassette tape. NLS plans to keep direct mail magazines on cassette tape for

now.

Judy Dixon also stated that Web Braille was alive and well. In the future, there will probably be some changes concerning Web Braille. Currently, there are approximately 4,500 Web Braille users and that due to the difficulties encountered this past May, NLS has a better appreciation of the use of Web Braille.

#### **EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR'S REPORT:**

Sharman Smith welcomed everyone. She reported that the facility was being utilized by more patrons and that many meetings were being scheduled at the library. New art exhibits were being displayed every three months.

The MLC budget for FY2008 had been submitted. The State of Mississippi operates on a July 1 through June 30 budget year. Many areas of funding had been requested. In total, the FY2008 budget request showed a 7.7 percent increase from the 2007 budget year. On September 26, MLC is scheduled to meet with the Legislative Budget Office to discuss the FY2008 budget request.

Once again, the Commission has had a very busy year, especially working with the public library sector and the eleven public libraries lost as a result of Hurricane Katrina. Over forty school libraries and four academic libraries were also lost due to the hurricane. A "Rebuild Mississippi" library fund has been established and more than \$250,000.00 has been raised to support this endeavor.

Sharman Smith stated that MLC was in good standing with the state legislature.

#### **FRIENDS OF HANDICAPPED READERS (FOHR) REPORT:**

Al Williamson reported that the move to the new location had been very positive and that the volunteer base has grown. Volunteers perform all manner of services such as: stamping applications and other materials with BPHLS address/telephone numbers, participation in the local recording program, rewinding books, shelving materials, data entry, and more. FOHR produced some posters with a tear-off tab which contained the contact number for BPHLS. The poster was distributed on a statewide basis. Due to the relocation to Eastwood Drive, brochures and other literature were in need of updating with the new address and change of telephone number.

There is a slight noise problem with the recording studio and the hope was that this would be resolved in the near future. As part of the local recording program, training has been scheduled for monitoring duties.

The puppeteering program, begun several years ago, was also discussed.

Al Williamson stated that he and his wife, Charlotte, would soon be relocating to Florida.

A FOHR outreach project conducted recently through the efforts of Melvin Smitherman was discussed. Community Night with the Braves (CNB) assisted in the promotion of Friends activities, recruitment of new volunteers, and registration of new patrons. Nine members, all wearing FOHR buttons, participated in this unique project. Brochures, Braille alphabet cards, and applications for library service were distributed during the baseball games. A PSA regarding the mission of FOHR was announced over the Braves loudspeaker system between innings of the game. FOHR has now been added to the permanent listing of CNB participants.

Funding for the purchase of 25 Playaways (self-playing digital books), for circulation to BPHLS patrons, was provided through FOHR.

Since the move to the new location, contributions to FOHR have increased. It was noted that FOHR had been started 27 years ago this December.

#### **TELEPHONE PIONEERS REPORT:**

Gene Cryder noted that some of the members of the Telephone Pioneers had “retired” as of July 1<sup>st</sup> of this year. Since March, 170 C-1 machines and 46 Braille machines have been repaired. As of this date, forty machines (C-1’s and E-1’s) have been reported lost due to Hurricane Katrina.

Ed Hill reported that he had repaired 109 Braille machines in 2005 and since January of 2006 he had repaired 81 Braille machines.

Jan Hawthorne stated that the American Printing House for the Blind donates Perkins Braille Writers to graduates of Schools for the Blind across the nation. Ed Hill was encouraged to write an article for the BPHLS newsletter, the *Reading Light*, concerning Braille Writers. Ed Hill said that it was heartwarming to help and that was his reward.

#### **DIGITAL SERVICES REPORT:**

John Whitlock stated that it had been educational dealing with adaptive technology in relation to downloading books from Audible.com. BPHLS is really excited about the Playaway as it is one book, one title and one piece of equipment that does not require downloading. The download of materials through Audible does not work well with JAWS and, because BPHLS is part of the Lobe Library Consortium, and shares the collection, permission must be obtained prior to any attempted download. Obtaining the permission can require several days if the individual responsible for granting permission is out of the office. Margaret Smitherman reported that the OTIS player was easy to use. John stated that initially most titles in the Lobe Library collection were abridged but now there are more unabridged than abridged titles.

John thanked the FOHR and the Council of the Blind for their generous donations that made it possible to purchase a small collection of Playaways. The website for Playaways is [www.findaway.com](http://www.findaway.com) As Playaways are purchased, they become the property of BPHLS.

#### **LIBRARIAN'S REPORT:**

Rahye Puckett stated that Hurricane Katrina caused significant problems for a period of time. BPHLS was told by NLS that books and machines reported missing or damaged as a result of Hurricane Katrina would be replaced. The Library continues to receive calls from patrons who had been displaced.

- The resource sharing contract with the Alabama Regional Library for circulation of recorded cassette (RC) titles numbered less than 40,000 was renewed. RC books numbered from 0 to 39,999 are still being repaired thanks to Jerry Roberts and the Circulation Services staff. As part of the contract with Alabama, BPHLS continues to provide descriptive videos to all eligible Alabama patrons requesting this service. During FY2006 BPHLS circulated 857 descriptive videos to 141 Alabama patrons.
- The Braille service contract with the State of Utah also remains in effect.
- BPHLS celebrated the 75<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the Pratt/Smoot Act. Deep appreciation goes to the Mississippi Council of the Blind and the Jackson Chapter of the Mississippi Council of the Blind for funding all speaker expenses related to this annual event. Jack and Jill Fox, narrators of NLS books for the National Library Service, and employed by the American Printing House for the Blind, were the guest speakers this past March.

- BPHLS distributed an annual survey. 99% of respondents indicated that the overall rating of BPHLS was excellent, very good or good.
- The worth of materials circulated by BPHLS was \$979,071.00 which includes Library of Congress cassette titles, Braille books, C-1 and E-1 players, descriptive videos, Lobe Library costs and Playaways.
- BPHLS served 5,864 patrons with ages ranging from 1 year to 112 years of age.
- More than 127,000 items were distributed despite closure of BPHLS for two months due to the relocation to the new facility and the after-effects of Hurricane Katrina.
- 19 individuals participated in this years' summer reading program which includes children and young adults.
- 1,274 books and magazines were duplicated during this timeframe.
- 2,206 books no longer under warranty were repaired.
- 15,221 copies of 2,250 new titles were added to the BPHLS collection.
- New staff included Margaret Smitherman who was hired in April as a Readers Advisor in the Patron Services Department. Andy Stogner was hired June first as the Machine Lending Librarian in the Circulation Services Department.
- The library staff remains very active in outreach programs and many staff members serve on several national committees concerning library activities. Staff continues to attend training and conferences.
- A special project this year was the facilitation an online book discussion between the Mississippi School for the Blind and the Ohio School for the Blind; the book read was "THE WIZARD OF OZ." Plans are being made to offer a reading club for adults, perhaps this winter.
- An intern worked at the Library during the summer as part of the Mississippi Industries for the Blind Summer Intern Program.

- 112 copies of the Louisiana Regional Library's newsletter were Brailled by BPHLS, due to problems related to Katrina.
- Since the February 2006 meeting of the BPHLS Advisory Committee, there have been 4,376 searches of the BPHLS online card catalog, the WebOPAC. Currently, there are 259 active OPAC patrons. 28.95% of the searches had zero hits.

The next meeting of the BPHLS Advisory Committee is scheduled to be held at 10:15 a.m., February 15, 2007 in the meeting room of the Mississippi Library Commission.

The meeting adjourned at 1:33 p.m.

Respectfully submitted,

Ralph Smitherman  
Secretary